Chicago Daily News 5-10-69

'I was a spy'

Infiltrating neo-Nazis 'frightening' UI chore

Copyright 1969
Chicago Daily News

By Henry De Zutter
Staff Writer

URBANA—The cheap paper pamphlet had two pictures on it: Jesus on the outside, Hitler on the inside.

It was given last spring to Robert Harris, University of Illinois senior who served as a campus spy for the FBI.

The pamphlet was handed to him by P. Michael Young, a neo-Nazi leader who worked with Harris in the university's computer laboratory. Infiltrating Young's group was Harris' first FBI assignment, and, Harris said, it "scared the wits out of me."

It was the most harrowing episode of his one-year stint as a campus spy.

While Harris later also spied on and infiltrated the leftist Students for a Democratic Society, he found in SDS nohe of the secretive, racist and menacing manner that he saw in the small but passionate group of neo-Nazis.

THE SELF STYLED NAZIS practiced target shooting regularly. Tey carried loaded firearms. And they were ready to open fire if trouble erupted in north Champaign's ghetto ditsrict.

Harris wrote in his diary last March that one of the neo-Nazi's said to him:

"Negroes had better know that they will be killed by the citizens if they start anything."

The pamphlet with Jesus on the outside and Hitler on the inside symbolized the style of the group, Harris said.

They proudly called themselves "Christian," and at time stalked like Cristian evangelists. But their message was hostile to every Christian concept:

On the pamphlet, both picture swere captioned with the same Biblical quotatio nfrom the Book of John: "And no ma npsake opelny of Him for fear of the JEWS!"

"Two thouasnd year sago the mots hated ysmbol on Earth was the cross," teh pamphlet asid. "In those days it took guts to stand up for Crist. . . . Te early Chritsians stuck with it adn finally won!

"Today," the pamphlet continued, "the most hated symbol is the swastika. Like the early Christians before us we will rise from the depths of persecution and hatred and rescue our race and bring to all the white people of the Earth the ideas of the greatest genius in two thousand years . . . Adolph Hitler."

Turn to Page 6, Column 4

from ... ing two delegates from the ... primary, on the gene...

'I was a UI campus spy'

Continued from Page 1

YOUNG GAVE Harris the pamphlet in April, 1968, a few days after Harris agreed to keep tabs on Young for the FBI

Urbana FBI agent Ronald Kloepfer had visited Harris in his dormitory room in March, 1968, after Harris had notified local police that Young was carrying loaded pistol.

"Kloepfer asked me to file reports on Young," Harris said. "He said Young wasn't considered dangerous or even important, but he thought that he might help shed light on activities of the Minutemen or the Ku Klux Klan."

Harris was happy to cooperate voluntarily and agreed to keep his actions confidential. Only his roommate knew about them, and he was sworn to secrecy. But he did hope eventually to make his story public.

He said, "I thought I could expose the group by writing an article about it in the Daily Illini," the student newspaper on whose staff Harris worked.

HARRIS DECIDED to keep a diary of his experiences. He left it with his roommate in case anything happened to him while he was with the Nazi group.

Harris bought a pistol and quietly gained the confidence of Young and his small clique, which seemed to number less than a dozen.

As far as Harris could learn, the neo-Nazi activities consisted mainly of boasting among themselves, scattering hate literature and conducting target practice at a nearby gravel pit.

"One night Young took us on a wild ride through the Negro district, where he scribbled insulting messages on the back of computer cards and threw them out the window of his car," Harris said.

car," Harris said.

"On another occasion we all went target shooting at the gravel pit. One guy — his name was Keith something-or-other — showed up with what looked like a World War II machinegun."

HARRIS FIRST met other members of the little group at 3 a.m. March 16, 1968, when they showed up in the computer laboratory to play anti-Negro tape recordings.

Among the laboratory visitors that night were Mike, a chubby fellow from Peoria who wore a disc on a chain around his neck. It was inscribed with "SS" and thunderbolt signs, Nazi symbols.

Another visitor was introduced as Greg, a university chemistry instructor who taught them how to make explosives and stink bombs.

HARRIS ONCE feared his role as an informer had been discovered by the group. It came after he had used his Daily Illini press card to gain

entry into a Wallace-for-President rally.

One of he Nazis questioned how he happened to have a press card, and asked how they could be sure Harris wasn't spying on them. But Young assured his buddy that Harris hoped to infiltrate the newspaper with Nazi propaganda.

"I had better watch it for a while," Harris wrote in his diary that night.

AT THIS point Harris was spending most of his free time with Young and his crew. He often drank coffee and joked with them at a local diner, or a place called "Etc.," a church-sponsored coffeehouse popular with them.

It was at the "Etc.," on April 22, 1968, that Harris joined Young and five others for a bizarre celebration of Adolf Hitler's 79th birthday.

"It was half serious, half joke," recalled Harris. "The other customers thought it was 'camp,' but I knew that Young really believed that Hitler was some sort of white god.

The birthday cake was German chocolate, with a swastika made of pink icing on tip.

Young was carrying his pistol. And a fellow named Bill was wearing a black "silk-looking jacket," Harris noted in his diary. Scrawled on it in white were crossed guns and "military Police — Stuttgart, Germany."

AFTER THE merrymaking, the celebrators — some armed with loaded pistols — went "nightriding." They painted swastikas on university fences and on the sidewalk in front of the home of a local liberal. They stinkbombed a leftist coffeehouse called "The Red Herring," and made insulting phone calls to Negroes.

Greg, the chemistry instructor, was reported to have called a Negro editor and told his wife, in an imitation Negro voice: "Uncle Tom power can vell, too."

ON MAY 11, Young was arrested on a gun charge. Police found his loaded pistol in the glove compartment of his car, after he was in an auto accident.

The next month Young was arrested again, this time because of a report to the FBI by Harris.

Around 2 a.m. on June 30 Harris spotted Young and a friend outside the computer laboratory. Young was wearing an army field jacket, a swastika arm band and boots.

Working alone in the laboratory was a student who had teased Young about his right-wing views and whom Young had threatened to "impress" with "the seriousness of our group."

HARRIS, FEARING trouble, called agent Kloepfer. He then called the university police, who already had been notified by Kloepfer.

Young was arrested, convicted, fined $265, and forced to resign from his civil service job. Harris' name was removed from police records at the FBI's request.

Shortly thereafter, Young reportedly left town to attend the Minutemen's guerrilla-training camp in Colorado.

HARRIS, NOW fearing for his own safety, decided not to write the newspaper article. He spent the summer at a friend's house in Urbana, going to his own home as infrequently as possible.

"They couldn't prove I was involved in the arrest," said Harris, "but I didn't want to take any chances."

EARLY LAST October, Harris heard from a supervisor at the computer laboratory that Young was back in town and "feeling ornery."

That same day Harris found a brand new Wallace-LeMay sticker lying under the bumper of his car in the parking lot near the university's Assembly Hall.

Harris noted in his diary: "The sticker looked as if it had been dropped after removing the backing and before sticking it on the bumper.

"I checked the car — all O.K. I don't know how to take this. It's entirely possible that it means nothing. But who knows."

A few days later FBI agent Kloepfer called Harris again with another assignment. This time the FBI wanted him to look into the affairs of the radical left — the Peace and Freedom Party and the university SDS chapter.

Monday: What Harris learned about SDS.